

Smoke alarms

While about 90 percent of U.S. households have smoke alarms installed, a CPSC survey estimated millions of those households, about 20 percent, do not have any working alarms.

"A working smoke alarm can save lives. It's that simple and that important," said CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton.

This is the time to change your smoke alarm batteries and if you don't have any smoke alarms to get at least 2. Even if you have a hard wired smoke alarm, (one running on 110 volts) it is recommended you have at least one battery unit.

Each year, an estimated 2,850 people die in residential fires, 16,000 people are injured, and more than 353,500 residential fires are reported to fire departments. CPSC recommends changing smoke alarm batteries at least once a year and testing each smoke alarm every month to make sure it is working properly. Long-life smoke alarms with 10-year batteries have been available to consumers since 1995. These long-life alarms also should be tested monthly.

At least one smoke alarm should be placed on every level of the home. The most important location is near the bedrooms to provide an early warning to all sleeping occupants. A smoke alarm should also be placed inside every bedroom. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to properly install a smoke alarm.

The CPSC also urges families to plan escape routes, identify a family meeting place safely outside the home, and practice leaving their homes in the event of a fire. It is important to be aware of and remove any obstacles that may prevent a quick and safe evacuation, such as blocked exits or jammed or barred windows.

"A little bit of planning goes a long way," said Stratton. "Every family should develop a home fire escape plan and practice it at least twice a year with the entire household."

Stratton also warns that children may not wake up from the sound of a smoke alarm. "Parents should hold a fire drill during the night so they can assess their children's ability to awaken and respond appropriately," he said. "If children, or any family member, cannot awaken to or hear the

smoke alarm, the escape plan should be adjusted to help all family members get out safely."

In addition to working smoke alarms, the CPSC recommends that every home have a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm near every sleeping area. Consumers also need to regularly test and replace batteries in CO alarms.